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All in the family

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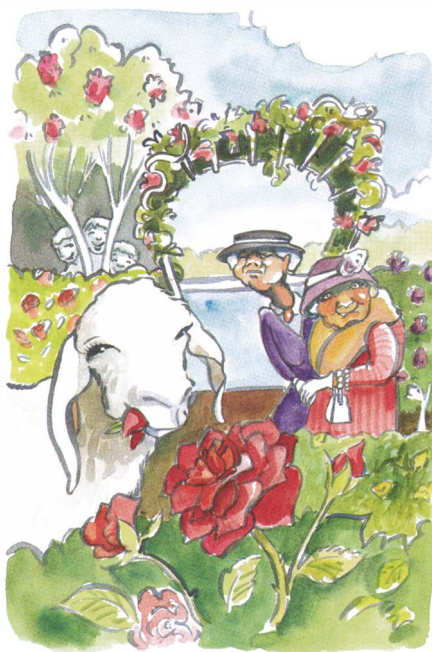
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These are just a few stories about mischief and mayhem at Furman through the years. Certainly many more tales, from both the old campus and the new, remain untold. Perhaps someday an industrious sort will seek them out and compile an anthology of the greatest pranks in Furman history.

In the meantime, with apologies to campus security and to housekeeping and to the administrative types who are duty-bound to publicly deplore such nonsense, I submit that wherever keen minds are convened and fun-loving people are gathered, the potential for



mischief is great. It is almost enough to make a distinguished college president shout aloud at a football game in Paladin Stadium, "FU all the time!"

Maybe this article inspires you to share your own splendid tale of social deviance from your Furman days. If so, please send your favorite story (or stories) to jim.stewart@furman.edu or to alumni@furman.edu. We'll post the cleaner ones (no worse than PG-13) at <http://alumni.furman.edu>, the alumni Web site, and might even print a few more in a future issue of the magazine.

All in the family

In-laws team up for book project

Each year, just before Christmas, the folks at Morningside Baptist Church in Spartanburg, S.C., rearrange the furniture in the sanctuary.

They move the altar aside and bring in a comfortable armchair — perfect for a down-home fireside chat.

And then they pack the house for the Sunday service, because they're eager to hear what's coming: the Rev. Kirk Neely's annual Christmas story.

For the last 10 years, Neely's gift to his congregation has been an original Christmas tale, one he's worked on for months to get just the right tone and feel. "The stories are usually about folks dealing with some sort of hardship, but they always have a hopeful message," he says.

The preacher, a 1966 Furman graduate, puts on quite a show. "It's as if you're in his living room," says his daughter-in-law, June Pitts Neely '97. "He knows how to deliver a story, and people really respond to hearing his message in that kind of format."

When he first started writing the stories, Kirk would occasionally give a printed version to friends as special presents. After a while he began asking June, an artist, if she could dress up the tales with illustrations, so they wouldn't be "just words in a notebook."

Initially, this was an informal collaboration. But come October, Kirk's imaginative Yuletide yarns and June's

artistic flair will be made available to a wider audience when Hub City Press of Spartanburg publishes *Comfort and Joy: Stories for Christmas*.

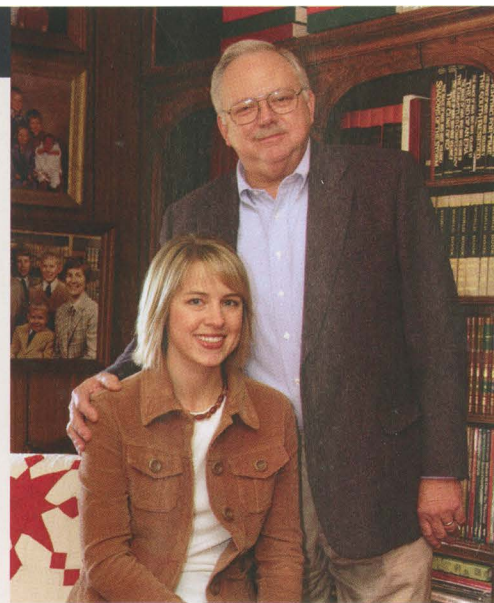
Hub City Press is known for its support of regional authors, and Kirk certainly qualifies as such. He has penned several devotional books and writes a column titled "By the Way" for the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal's* weekly magazine.

For Kirk and June, the book is the latest milestone in a relationship that goes back 13 years. That's when June, as a freshman at Furman, began dating Erik Neely '95, son of Kirk and Clare Long Neely '66. June quickly grew close to the entire Neely clan, which included Erik's four siblings, and especially to Kirk, who she describes as "such a dad not just to his kids, but to their friends. He's always interested and offering help."

After she graduated, she and Erik married and moved to Charleston, S.C., where she worked as an artist and Erik was an award-winning newspaper reporter. Erik was also a vocal supporter of his father's writing efforts, often encouraging him to write a novel.

When Erik died suddenly in November 2000, the family was devastated. But faith and support for one another helped sustain them.

June now lives in Nashville, where she paints and teaches elementary art. Her bond with the Neelys remains strong,



and she visits and vacations with the family when the opportunity arises.

Her collaboration with "Papa Kirk" on the book, she says, is just one more way for them to remain connected to each other — and to Erik.

Kirk, a proud advocate of his daughter-in-law's talent, is pleased that the Christmas stories will live on in book form. He says, "Sermons are nice, but they tend to have a short life span. The printed word has more longevity."

And about that novel Erik wanted him to write? "I intend to do it," he says with conviction — then adds slyly, "It will be about an overworked, underpaid, overfed pastor in the South."

— Jim Stewart

MARK OLENCI